

1889

May 6-89

To the Common Council of the City of San Diego:

Under the authority given by the Constitution the people of San Diego have framed and ratified a Charter for their own government; it has been approved by the Legislature; and the City passes to-day under the operation of the new organic law.

The new Charter was drafted with due deliberation; it was considered Section by Section; and, after ample debate upon each proposition, and careful revision, it was finally, at the end of a session of thirty days, adopted as a whole by the unanimous vote of the Board of Freeholders. It was published for twenty days in two of our daily newspapers, and after a period of thirty days from the completion of the publication, it was submitted to the people. There had been abundant time given the electors to read and study the instrument; there had been the fullest discussion of its provisions in public meetings and in the columns of the press. The remarkably large vote polled at the Charter election showed how general and deep an interest was felt in the subject; and the great majority cast in favor of ratification gave emphatic evidence of the popular approval of the proposed plan of City government. Never was a question of public policy more clearly presented; never was the deliberate judgment of the people more distinctly expressed.

The movement of the citizens of San Diego which has given us the recent significant decision at the ballot-box is very much more than a transient manifestation of discontent with the preceding administration of City affairs. It is the result of a belief that had been steadily growing in the public mind until it

had become a fixed conviction, that we must reform the municipal constitution before we could effectively reform the municipal administration. It was obvious at the outset that such a consummation could only be reached through the concurrent action of all citizens who were convinced of its necessity, without regard to their differences of opinion upon questions of party politics. The movement was therefore necessarily non-partisan in its organization; and the attainment of its primary object was logically followed by the election of non-partisan officers to carry the provisions of the new instrument of government into practical operation. It will undoubtedly continue to manifest itself in future City elections.

A city is essentially a corporation organized to secure certain public benefits and doing business upon the capital represented by its assessment roll, in which every tax-payer is a shareholder, and the city officers are the directors chosen to carry on its affairs for the common advantage. The shareholders in other corporations do not concern themselves about the political views of their trustees, so long as the trust is profitably and honestly managed; and the fact that this is a public corporation affords no reason for a departure from the common-sense rules of private business.

In the election which has placed the government of this city in our hands, upon a distinct presentation of the issue, the people very plainly declared against the application of any political test, and demanded that the business of the city should be conducted upon strictly business principles. The obligation resting upon us as the servants of the people is manifest.

The system of municipal administration which we are about to inaugurate in San Diego differs radically from that which has preceded it. While some of its features may seem novel to California cities, they are entirely consistent with the Constitution of our State, and have been satisfactorily tested for several years in the best governed cities of the older States of the Union. The old charter united legislative and executive powers in a Council, whereof the Mayor was the presiding officer. The new charter distinctly separates the legislative and executive departments. The legislative power is exclusively vested in a Common Council of two houses--one a continuous body, representing the city at large; the other representing the several wards of the city, and renewed at each general municipal election. The executive power is vested in the Mayor, and in subordinate departments, each charged with its particular functions and duties, and responsible for the proper performance of its own special work, and all under the supervision of the chief executive. The Common Council enacts the ordinances and regulations for the local government, and provides the revenue for its maintenance; the Executive carries the ordinances and regulations into effect, and supervises the expenditures of the revenue. The Legislature possesses a check upon the Executive in its control of the revenue, and power to fix and regulate official salaries, and in the power of confirmation of executive appointments vested in the Board of Delegates. The Executive possesses a check upon the Legislature in the veto power. Under this system the exercise of all powers is guarded by careful limitations; the public business is so organized as to secure the utmost efficiency; and official responsibility is fixed

where it properly belongs. With an honest purpose to carry out the provisions of the Charter, in letter and in spirit, the government can always be economically administered, with ample regard to the growth of the City. It is equally adequate to the requirements of the present population and of a population many times greater; the force of employees may at any time be reduced or expanded according to the necessities of the time; and the limit of taxation, with a just valuation of property, will always allow a sufficient revenue for the reasonable and proper expenses of administration. Such amendments as experience may show to be desirable may be made at intervals of two years by the electors of the City, instead of resorting to the former tedious, costly and uncertain method of seeking relief from the State Legislature, the great majority of whose members can have no personal interest in or knowledge of the special needs of our municipality.

In undertaking to put in motion an entirely new form of government, we assume a task which demands more than ordinary devotion to duty. We shall, as a necessity of the situation, have to deal with difficult questions at the beginning of our course, the settlement of which will require the exercise of the wisest judgment and the utmost patience. We must remember that our work is not to be done in a day. Above all things the harmonious co-operation of the several departments is earnestly to be desired. This will give us the best assurance of success, and will most certainly bring to our administration the strong support of the people, who

have called us to this service, and to whom we are responsible for its faithful performance.

The question of finance meets us at the outset. The City assessment roll for the current year has just been made up, and the final footings were only completed yesterday evening. It will devolve upon the Common Council to make the levy of taxation during the present week. In calling your attention to this subject, I shall briefly review the financial condition of the City, as ascertained from the report of my predecessor in January last, and the books in the office of the City Clerk. The assessment roll for the year 1888 amounted to \$23,699,117, upon which a tax was levied for all purposes of 89 cents in the \$100, making a total sum of \$210,922.14. The total receipts of the City Treasury in 1888 (exclusive of the proceeds of sewer construction bonds) were \$447,535.25. The total expenditures for all purposes (other than sewer construction) were \$392,210.24. The balances in the several funds on January 1st were as follows: Bonded debt redemption, interest and sinking funds, \$18,857.69; Park fund, \$1,628.56; Library fund ^{\$7,333.²²; School fund} \$32,129.82. Total, \$59,949.29. The general fund was reported "overdrawn" \$4,624.28. The total bonded indebtedness of the City, January 1st, was \$513,000.00, reported as follows: Bonds of 1885, due in 1905 (7 per cent) \$66,000.00; Bonds of 1887, due in 1905 (7 per cent) \$1,000.00; Bonds for sewer construction, due in 1907 (5 per cent) \$370,000; Bonds for public school construction, due in 1909 (5 per cent) \$76,000.00.

The total current expenses of the City in 1888, exclusive of

public schools and interest and sinking funds, were \$249,591.90, of which \$99,637.65 was for salaries.

There are now in the office of the City Clerk unpaid demands aggregating to date the sum of \$25,873.07, of which sum \$3,668.82 had accrued prior to January 1st, 1889.

The assessment roll for the current fiscal year aggregates \$15,436,271, being \$8,262,846 less than that of last year. The limit of taxation under the Charter is 90 cents in the \$100, and the full levy would amount to \$138,926.44, or \$71,995.70 less than last year. The 90 cent limit includes the public school tax, and all other items of expenditure except for the interest and sinking funds.

A careful estimate of the probable expenses of the city government for the current year (including the unpaid demands now on file in the office of the City Clerk) shows that, aside from the public schools, the sum of \$174,640.00 is the smallest amount that can be set down; and this allows nothing for contingencies. It will not be safe to estimate a larger yield from the tax levy of this year than \$120,000.00, as nearly three millions of the assessment will be found in the "unknown" list, and is likely to be delinquent at the end of the year. The largest estimate that can be made of revenue from other sources is \$57,000.00; making the total probable revenue for the current fiscal year about \$177,000.00. The estimates for probable expenditures contemplate a reduction of about thirty thousand dollars in the salary account, and of over forty-five thousand dollars in the general expense account, or a

total reduction of over seventy-five thousand dollars.

Besides the amount to be raised for general purposes, the sum of \$44,990.00 will be required to meet the bonded debt redemption, interest and sinking fund demands, which will call for an additional levy of about 30 cents---or \$1.20 in all.

The summary here given of the financial situation will sufficiently indicate the necessity of the most rigid economy in every department of the administration. The officers and employees of the City will be expected to render diligent service, and the number of employees and amount of compensation must be confined to the lowest limit compatible with the proper transaction of the public business.

It is not pleasant to have to communicate these facts in regard to our finances; but we must meet the issue squarely, and take the assessment as we find it; we are powerless to change it. If we face the situation with the fixed determination to "live within our means", I am not sure that we shall not profit by the experience.

It is my own opinion that the aggregate property valuation of the city is really very little, if any, less to-day than in 1888. The population is larger than when the previous assessment was made; and while in some parts of the city there has undoubtedly been a ~~decrease~~ considerable decrease in values, in other sections

there should have been no reduction from the former valuation, which was originally much too low. Besides this, it should be borne in mind that there have been large additions to the roll in the valuable improvements made during the year. A very strong pressure from the public was brought upon the Assessor to reduce the valuations; but I doubt if the result is exactly what was desired. The just assessment of property for taxation is one of the most difficult problems of administration. The rights of every taxpayer are ^c ~~con~~ⁿ served to have an equitable valuation. Boards of Equalization are vested with important powers in this respect. I commend the general subject to the consideration of the Common Council.

While the revenues of the city will be extremely narrow during the present year, that fact should not preclude the carrying forward of really necessary public improvements. There are certain improvements that are valuable investments; when made they are substantial assets, and in due season pay a large interest on their cost. Our sewer system is an improvement of this nature; boulevard construction, good pavements and sidewalks, and respectable public buildings, belong to the same list. Let the work only be honestly done, so that the people get a dollar's worth for every dollar expended, and indebtedness incurred in such improvements is not to be greatly dreaded in a progressive commercial city. Under the provisions of the Charter, street and boulevard improvements can be carried on without burdening the property-owner with large immediate assessments, and without increasing the

public indebtedness. We shall probably never see a more favorable time than now in which to take steps toward the erection of a City hall, such as San Diego ought to possess.

Reference to the need of a City Hall leads me to urge upon the Common Council the necessity of providing without delay for the safe-keeping of the records, maps, etc., in the different departments of the government. Some of these records are of priceless value; for, if destroyed, they cannot be replaced; and they are now in hourly danger of destruction. If possible, the offices of the city should all be brought together under one roof, in some substantial brick building; and provision should be made for storing in some fire-proof vault the more important archives of the city.

Early provision should be made for the proper indexing and printing of the City Charter. A sufficient number of copies should be printed to supply all the officers of the city, and to exchange with other cities, and also to supply the public demand. Enough copies ~~of~~ could be sold to very nearly defray the expense of printing.

"Section 24 of Article X of the Charter provides that "all Ordinances, Orders, and Resolutions of the City of San Diego in Force at the time this Charter takes effect, and not inconsistent therewith, shall continue in force until amended or repealed." The whole body of general Ordinances adopted under the old Charter

should be reviewed, and a Code of general Ordinances ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ harmony with the Charter should be framed and adopted. This work is of immediate importance, and should be placed in the hands of the City Attorney without delay.

"The Charter provides for the publication in book form of all Ordinances of a general nature at least once in two years. I would suggest that in the publication of the Charter, arrangements be made with the printer to have a sufficient additional number printed in shape to be bound up with the first edition of the Ordinances so published. This can be done at a very small increase of the cost.

"The City of San Diego owns, in addition to its magnificent fourteen hundred acre Park tract, a great deal of valuable real estate, and other property. No list of this City property has ever been published, nor, so far as I have been able to ascertain, has any list of it ever been made up. I would recommend the appointment of a Committee on public property by each Board of the Common Council; and that the Board of Public Works be required to keep a corrected list of all of the real estate, buildings and other property of the city on file in their office, and return the same with the proper valuation thereof, in their annual report to the Mayor.

"There are doubtless other recommendations which might properly be submitted in this communication; but the extremely limited time afforded me in which to obtain and consider the information regarding the affairs of the city already commented upon, obliges me to forbear.

"I assume the office of Mayor of San Diego with a very distinct ~~realiz~~ realization of its responsibility. I shall endeavor to discharge the duties devolved upon me as they are written in the law, without fear or favor, in the interest of the city and all of its citizens. And I earnestly ask your co-operation in this honorable service.

Douglas Gunn

San Diego, May 6, 1889.

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San Diego, May 6, 1888.

Handwritten note: Read to Board of Aldermen

Mayor Gunn's
inaugural Message
to the Common Council

Read to Board of
Aldermen ^{and vote of}
Hanko tendered Mayor
Gunn's Message ordered
filed with the archives
of the City.

J. A. Thomas, City Clerk
By J. C. Patton, Deputy.

regarding the affairs of the city and the city clerk's communication
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be supplied in this communication; but the extremely limited
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6011
May 6th 1889

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR.

Relative to the new Charter

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